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DESIRE AND DIVORCE IN *SERGLIGE CON CULAINN*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the expression of ideas about love, marriage and divorce in *Serglige Con Culainn*. It is argued that the two versions of the tale, both of which are incomplete, exhibit distinctive approaches to love and the portrayal of the female characters. The earlier recension depicts male desire as a violent attack by Otherworld women that renders the man incapacitated. The later version provides a radically different view, offering a strikingly sympathetic portrait of the two female protagonists which may suggest a female audience. This version gives a remarkable insight into sexual mores and marital breakdown in a protracted and detailed negotiation involving the three main characters. It reveals tensions between male and female views of marriage and particularly of the practice of concubinage. It values loyalty between married partners over the fulfilment of desire and demonstrates the enduring and destructive effects of passion which are healed here only through magical interventions.

INTRODUCTION

It is generally recognised that *Serglige Con Culainn*, 'The wasting sickness of Cú Chulainn',¹ contains elements of considerable literary force, most notably among the verse, and it is unfortunate, therefore, that the sole independent representative of the text is a patchwork created out of the remains of two distinct versions. It is preserved independently only in the late-eleventh/early twelfth-century manuscript *Lebor na hUidre* where, however, H has erased or removed portions of the original text and replaced them for the most part with what is generally taken to be a different version.² The tale was originally transcribed by M, thought to be Máel Muire mac Céilechair of Clonmacnoise who died in 1106, but at some later date, probably in the twelfth century, H removed the opening pages of M's text and replaced it with another text corresponding to the first 338 lines of the edited text (SCC §1-§29 l.338 = LU 3222-539). H has also made several interpolations in what remains of the leaves penned by M, including one very lengthy intervention which deals with Cú Chulainn's journey to the Otherworld (SCC §34 l.575-§38 l. 681 = LU 3775-877).

¹ The title in the manuscript, *Seirgligi Con Culaind inso síis *7 óenét Emire*, has been added by a later hand (LU l.3221) and must refer to the version of the tale that included Emer as Cú Chulainn's wife (see Thurneysen 1921, 414). I use the text of Dillon's edition (1953a), referred to here as SCC, and his translation (1953b) throughout unless otherwise specified. I would like to thank the editors of *Ériu* and Dr Elizabeth Boyle for their perceptive and valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any errors that remain are solely attributable to me.

² Elizabeth Duncan (2015) has recently argued that the scribe traditionally identified as H actually represents six different scribes. According to her analysis, the interpolations in SCC are the work of a single scribe, the most prolific of the interpolators whom she identifies as H1. The same scribe was responsible for the vast bulk of interpolations in Ulster Cycle texts in the manuscript including *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and *Tochmarc Emire*. For clarity and simplicity I use H here to refer to H1.

Although H's text was written at a later date, it is, in fact, linguistically older than M's text, belonging probably to the tenth century according to Dillon (1953a xiii-xvi). Despite the anteriority of the language of H's text, Thurneysen (1921, 413-16) believed that this was the more recent version and hence he called it B, while he used A to signify M's text.

Thurneysen's view is not sustainable and it is now generally held that B is the older text in point of language and content.³ The most conspicuous distinction between the two versions is that Recension A calls Cú Chulainn's wife Emer, daughter of Forgall, as is generally the case throughout the Ulster Cycle, whereas Recension B names her Eithne in Gubai.⁴ Dillon ascribes most of the first part of the tale down to *Briathartheosc Con Culainn* (SCC §§1-27) to Recension B with the exception of part of the introduction (§§2-3) and a very short section in which Cú Chulainn refuses to be brought to Emer (§9 ll.82-5).⁵ Emer appears again in §28 and Dillon concludes that this section, despite being copied by H, also belongs to Recension A, although other parts of this same section may, in fact, belong to Recension B as I shall argue below.

Despite the clear synthetic nature of the surviving text, there has been a tendency in recent studies to conflate the two versions, even to the extent of calling Eithne by the name of Emer. This is methodologically questionable, and it is doubtful whether we can legitimately interpret events or themes in either version in light of the other, let alone conflate them without comment. Thurneysen (1921, 414) postulated that H was not the compiler who stitched the two recensions together but merely drew on an already conflated version, but even if we do not accept this to be the case it could be argued that the scribe H viewed the extant text as a whole. However, the degree to which the compiler, or H, believed that he was creating a unified text is hardly established. Features such as Lóeg's duplicated journey to the Otherworld might have been tolerated by a redactor, although as Carey (1994, 82-3) has observed, there is a difference in tone and content between the depictions in the two versions which has not been resolved. The morphing of Eithne to Emer *in medias res* certainly jars although it is conceivable, even likely, that H regarded them as a single individual.⁶ More importantly, as we shall see below, there are distinct differences between the two recensions in the portrayal of Fand and her relationship with Cú Chulainn. Therefore, in what follows we will treat the two recensions separately and try to avoid the temptation of interpreting one version in light of the other.

In her seminal work on the character of Emer, Joanne Findon (1997, 131) characterises SCC as a powerful exploration of the female in which Emer is 'a moral agent, arguing forcefully against the chaotic forces of fragmentation unleashed in male-female relationships by

³ See, for example, the arguments advanced by Carey 1994.

⁴ I follow Carey (1995) who points out that Dillon's reading, 'Eithne Ingubai', is not supported by the syllabic count in the verse in which she is mentioned.

⁵ Salberg (1992, 162) largely follows Dillon's conclusions about the relationship between H's text and Recension B. For an important consideration of the different strata in the text, and particularly the place of *Briathartheosc Con Culainn* in the tradition, see Carey 1994.

⁶ The composite text happily allows the two wives of Cú Chulainn to take to the stage, although tellingly we never see both of them at the same time. Eithne is described at the outset as Cú Chulainn's wife (*ben*). After Cú Chulainn falls ill, Emer is introduced but is notable by her absence – she remains at Dún Delgan while Cú Chulainn refuses to be brought to her (rather, he is brought to Emain where he is tended by Eithne). Once Emer finally appears on the scene, Eithne disappears from view altogether.

uncontrolled desires'. In this paper, I will analyse various gendered relationships within the tale in an attempt to identify and elucidate its core themes. In the first part, I will examine Cú Chulainn's extraordinary illness, its cause and context in order to shed some light on the gender relationships within Recension B and to come to a better understanding of some key ideas that it expresses. In the second part, I will build on Findon's work to examine Recension A's concerns with issues of marital fidelity, concubinage and divorce. I will propose a reading in which Emer contemplates divorce rather than existence within a relationship that threatens her dignity and status as Cú Chulainn's wife.

I

The tale opens with an assembly of the Ulstermen in preparation for the festival of Samain. While they wait for the last warriors to arrive, a beautiful flock of birds passes by and the women covet them. Cú Chulainn hunts them and returns with a pair for each of the women but neglects to bring any for his own wife, Eithne. Later, two of the most beautiful birds ever seen fly past and Cú Chulainn vows to fetch these for Eithne, although she warns him against the effort. He fails to bring the birds down with his first two shots but wounds one with his third. He falls asleep by a pillar stone whereupon two women appear to him and beat him with whips until he is nearly dead. The women turn out to be no ordinary females but rather denizens of the Otherworld, Fand and her sister LÍ Ban.

This is a stunning and surprising opening to the tale that presents a radical departure from the expected norms of storytelling. Findon (1997, 110-11) observes that it parodies the motif of the fairy mistress who arrives to woo a mortal king as seen, for example, in *Echtrae Chonnlai*. Rather than causing Cú Chulainn to fall in love with her, Fand violently attacks him. While female violence is not unknown in early Irish literature, the shocking thing here is the intensity of the attack and the fact that the paragon of Ulster military might is so easily overcome by two women, albeit while he is asleep. In this section, I wish to revisit the events surrounding the attack in an effort to present a more coherent analysis of the internal logic of the tale than has previously been possible.

HUNTING THE BIRDS

While much attention has been focussed on the extraordinary act of female usurpation in SCC, little has been made of the events directly leading up to Cú Chulainn's debility. It is easy to interpret Cú Chulainn's failure to present his wife with a pair of birds as little more than a blunder but it is, I think, more complex than that. Indeed, it looks as if there is much more to the hunting of birds than the acquisition of alluring gifts.⁷ The women of Ulster are portrayed in a negative light in this episode. They are capricious in their excessive desire (*Batar imtholtanaig*) for the beautiful birds and they start squabbling among themselves

⁷ In the first hunt, Cú Chulainn appears to slay the birds rather than capture them. He plies his sword on them, causing their wings and claws to fall into the water of the lake (*ataig táithbéim dia chlaidiub dóib co ruilgetar a mbossa *7 a n-eti dind usciu*, §6). In the second hunt, however, he initially uses a slingshot (*Dosléici Cú Chulaind cloich foraib*, §7), turning to a spear only after the sling fails him. In the *Táin*, he uses small stones to stun birds rather than kill them (O'Rahilly 1976, 147). Thus, it might be inferred that the women of Ulster received dead birds, perhaps for their feathers, while he intended to capture Eithne's birds alive.

(*Gabais cách díb immarbáig*, ‘Each of them began to boast’) (§4 1.26). When Cú Chulainn is approached to hunt the birds he becomes agitated, dismissing the women as whores (*merdrecha*) (§5 1.36). Their passion for him is evocatively portrayed by Leborcham’s declaration that the women had made themselves blind in one eye on account of him. The author is mocking the women here:

*Cech ben ro charastar Conall Cernach ba clóen, cach ben dano ro charastár
Cúscraid Mend Macha mac Conchobair dobered forminde fora erlabrai. Atá samlaid,
cech ben ro charastar Coin Culaind no gollad iarom a rosc fo chosmailius Chon
Culaind *7 ara sheirc.*

‘every woman who loved Conall Cernach was crooked; and every woman who loved Cúscraid the Stammerer of Macha, son of Conchobor, pretended to stammer badly. Likewise, every woman who loved Cú Chulainn used to blind her eye in the likeness of Cú Chulainn and for love of him’ (SCC §5 ll. 40-44; Dillon 1953b, 49).

The foolish women have destroyed their natural beauty by desiring and adopting the characteristics of the warriors that they love.

Cú Chulainn’s dismissal of the women of Ulster as *merdrecha* may be more than mere hyperbole. Leborcham, who appeals to Cú Chulainn on behalf of the women of Ulster to hunt the birds, may have been a lover of Cú Chulainn. Elsewhere she is a satirist and troublemaker as shown by Le Mair (2013), and her appearance, therefore, is a portent that trouble is afoot. In *Longes Mac nUislenn*, she instigates the love affair between Noísiu and Deirdriu (see Le Mair 2013, 38) and so it may be no coincidence that she again interferes here in affairs of the heart. More importantly, in the genealogies she is said to have been the mother of two sons to Cú Chulainn (Le Mair 2013, 46) so she may be more than a messenger here, perhaps an erstwhile or future lover. This adds further piquancy to the distribution of birds – all these women are not just girls who are smitten by the great warrior but they are actual or potential mates. In this tale of sexual politics, Eithne may be just one of many partners.

Cú Chulainn’s failure to obtain a gift for Eithne, therefore, is much more than an uncomfortable oversight – it reinforces her tenuous status in relation to Cú Chulainn. She could be jettisoned at any moment. In the face of this threat to her marriage and her position within society, Eithne asserts her own worth in clear moral terms. While the women of Ulster might offer themselves to Cú Chulainn, she shares herself with no one but him. This immediately sets her on a higher moral plain than the other women for although they flirt with Cú Chulainn and perhaps even sleep with him, she remains completely faithful. Her devotion is about to be tested to breaking point by subsequent events, however, namely, Fand’s arrival on the scene. Cú Chulainn attempts to make good his neglect and vows to capture the most beautiful pair of birds from the next flock to arrive but it is this decision that leads directly to his assault by the two Otherworld women.

Two birds bound together by a chain of red gold subsequently arrive at the lake and Cú Chulainn goes out to hunt them (§7). Eithne attempts to dissuade him because she recognises that they possess some magical power. Once more, she has put his interest above her own

immediate desire. Cú Chulainn ignores her advice, refusing to be deterred by the obvious supernatural danger. He fires two slingshots at the birds and misses on both occasions. He recognises that something mysterious has occurred for he has never missed a shot since he took up arms and he declares that he is doomed (*Am trúsa*, 'I am fey') (§7 l.67). A final shot of his javelin pierces the wing of one of the birds and they both dive under the lake.

THE ATTACK

Cú Chulainn falls asleep and in a dream sees two women approach him and begin to beat him with horsewhips (§8 ll.75-8). The beating lasts a long time (*fri cíana móir*, l.77), each of them taking turns, until Cú Chulainn is left for dead. Layzer (2001, 139-41) and Ní Bhrolcháin (2009) have interpreted Cú Chulainn's flogging by women as an act of sadomasochism, but we must not forget that this is a dream. As Bitel asserts in another context, medieval dreams are imbued with 'a metaphysical importance that we rarely give to ours' and can provide routes into the Otherworld rather than act as mere 'outlets for the libidinous id' (Bitel 1991, 39). McKenna (2011, 169-73) has more convincingly placed the episode within the context of medieval Christian anxieties about the interpretation of dreams. The Church Fathers were concerned to control the potential threat to the Church's authority posed by dreams, and there was a clear need to discriminate between visions sent by God and those sent by the Devil.

Night-time assaults are common in mythology and folklore and may owe their origin in reality to the scientifically documented phenomenon of sleep paralysis (Green 1997, 587-8). Physical assaults such as that experienced by Cú Chulainn are also recorded in ecclesiastical lore. McKenna draws attention to St Paul's account in his second letter to the Corinthians which describes him being attacked by demons after God sent him 'a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me' (*datus est mihi stimulus carnis meae angelus Satanae ut me colaphizet*) (2 Cor. 7).⁸ Angels may also attack sinners and are frequently depicted wielding scourges and rods in eschatological texts. For example, pairs of virgins accompany the archangels Michael and Uriel carrying iron rods and, most notably, fiery whips in *Fís Adomnáin* (McKenna 2011, 172-3), and according to Adomnán, Colum Cille bore a scar on his face after he was struck by an angel's whip in a dream (Anderson & Anderson 1961, iii.5). The use of a whip is a remarkable parallel to the Cú Chulainn story, but a more telling analogue is provided by the story of Anthony the Great who suffered physical assaults by the devil while alone in the desert: *ita eum aggregatis satellitibus suis, uaria caede lacerauit, ut doloris magnitudo et motum auferret et uocem*, 'Coming one night with a multitude of demons, he so cut him with stripes that he lay on the ground speechless from the excessive pain' (Ellershaw 1892 §8; Bertrand 2005, 163). The next day, an acquaintance found him 'lying on the ground as though dead' (*in terra iacere quasi mortuum*). The occurrence of these events at night suggests that, like Cú Chulainn, he was afflicted by dreams that resulted in real physical injury. The story of Anthony the Great was known in England and the Old English Martyrology recounts that the demons also clothed themselves as women and came to tempt him although it is not clear if these succubae are the same as the devils who beat him:

⁸ I follow the Vulgate here.

Onð hine þær deofla costodon mid ofermaete unclæne luste, efne swa þæt hi eodon on niht to him on geglengedra wifa hiwe. Ðær he geseah eac þone fulan gast þe men lærð unalyfede lustas. Þæt wæs sweart cniht onð lytel onð egeslic, onð he him sæde sylf þæt his nama wære spiritus fornicationis, þæt is dernes geligeres gast. Hwylum ða deofol hine swungan þæt he ne mihte hine astyrigean ne noht cweðan.

And devils tempted him there endlessly with dirty lecherousness, even to the point where they visited him at night in the appearance of dressed-up women. There he also saw the foul spirit which incites men to illicit lust. That was a black boy, small and horrible, and he himself told him that his name was *spiritus fornicationis*, which means ‘spirit of illicit sex’. Sometimes the devils beat him so that he was unable to move or talk. (Rauer 2013, 50-51).⁹

The attack is also mentioned in the tale in a section transcribed *in rasura* by H (= LU 3514-33, SCC §28). As Emer is mentioned here it is invariably taken to be derived from Recension A, simply recopied by H (Salberg 1992, 162). However, the ascription is based on rather shaky grounds and it does not seem to me to belong to Recension A in its entirety. This portion of the text falls naturally into two sections, a prose introduction in which Cú Chulainn sends Lóeg to fetch Emer, and a *roscad* beginning ‘*Mór espa do láech*’ put in the mouth of Lóeg. The prose almost certainly belongs to Recension A but the verse is more probably derived from Recension B as we shall now see.

It has been observed that H’s writing here is denser than on the previous page and Thurneysen (1921, 421 n.5) suggested that the scribe had to erase the *roscad* written by M and recopy it in order to fit it into the space available to him. However, we might object that if space was at a premium, why did H not pursue a more economical solution, namely, to write more densely on p.46 and allow the whole of M’s text on p. 47 to stand? A more compelling interpretation of H’s erasure would be that he wanted to enter some new material there that had been absent from M’s text or had been displaced from its original position. There are three reasons why this scenario is preferable. Firstly, Recension A, as transmitted by M, is characterised by its copious use of verse but this is almost invariably in syllabic metres. M’s text includes a short *roscad* dialogue between Cú Chulainn and Emer (§§40-41) but there are no hortatory *roscada* in his hand with which we could compare Lóeg’s ‘*Mór espa do láech*’. By this measure alone we would have to conclude that it is more likely that Lóeg’s *roscad* was taken from Recension B. Secondly, the contents of the *roscad*, which is an exhortation for Cú Chulainn to rise up from his sickbed, closely echoes Emer’s versified appeal beginning ‘*Érig, a gérait Ulad*’ at §30 written in the hand of M and so from Recension A. If we were to apply the same logic to this as has been applied to the rest of H’s insertions, then Lóeg’s *roscad* would be taken as a doublet of Emer’s poem and so assigned to Recension B. Of course, this method of assigning material to different recensions is somewhat flawed (see West 1999) and we cannot entirely dismiss the possibility that Recension A contained both exhortations. Finally, there is an inconsistency between the prose

⁹ There is no evidence that Anthony’s Life was known in early medieval Ireland. He is mentioned in the martyrologies but there is no reference to his confrontation with demons. Physical attacks by demons are, however, reasonably well attested in Anglo-Saxon accounts (Cheong, no date).

and the verse in §28. In the prose, Cú Chulainn states that he is feeling better now (*is ferr a chách itósa*, ‘I am recovering’, §28 l.313) and is clearly able to instruct Lóeg to fetch Emer. While it is not impossible to reconcile this with Lóeg’s subsequent appeal to Cú Chulainn to get out of bed in the *roscad*, it is slightly odd that he should wait until he is dispatched on his errand before attempting to rouse his master. On balance, therefore, it seems more likely that the *roscad* is taken from Recension B while the introductory prose is, as generally accepted, taken from Recension A.

Parts of the *roscad* are still obscure and it is only partially translated by Dillon (1953b, 59),¹⁰ but it does provide some insight into the nature of the attack on Cú Chulainn and his attackers that has not previously been considered. Cú Chulainn’s assailants are described as *genaiti* (SCC l. 318) which is usually taken to be a form of *genit*, ‘a female mythical being of malevolent powers’ (*DIL* s.v. *genit*).¹¹ Borsje (2007) has drawn attention to another instance of Cú Chulainn’s struggle with *geniti* in *Fled Bricrenn* (LU 8872-82). The three competing heroes there are sent to encounter the valley *geniti* (*geniti glinne*). Conall and Lóegaire are easily overcome and Cú Chulainn is initially beaten and subdued (*nos curat *7 nos traethat inna geniti hé*, LU 8877-78). However, he eventually triumphs over them and the valley is filled with the blood of the *geniti*. Their gender is not specified in *Fled Bricrenn* but the *geniti glinne* are elsewhere identified as female (Borsje 2007, 75-6). It may be assumed that *geniti glinne* inhabited particular valleys where they lay in wait for unwary travellers, like Cú Chulainn in *Fled Bricrenn*, but *genit* might be taken more generally to refer to (female) spirits such as Fand and Lí Ban who are described as *mná síde* in the immediately preceding prose.

The *roscad* further illuminates the nature of the attack on Cú Chulainn, although the relevant lines remain partially obscure: *genaiti... condot rodbsat, | condot chachtsat, | condot ellat, | eter bríga banespa*, ‘demons... and they have injured (?) thee, they have confined thee, they torture thee in the toils of women’s wantonness’ (SCC §28 ll.318-23). Several interpretations of *-rodbsat*, all problematic, have been offered but it is invariably taken to refer to some kind of injurious attack (SCC p. 82; Mees 2007, 22) and would seem to allude to the beating by Fand and Lí Ban described earlier in the tale. The second verb in the triad indicates casting into bondage (*DIL* s.v. *cachtaid* ‘shackles, fetters; imprisons, confines, subjugates’). Mees (2007, 21) emends the third element in the sequence to *-ellacht* which he takes to be pret. pass. sg. of *in-loing*, the central meaning of which seems to be ‘binds (together)’ (see *DIL* s.v.),¹² but we could emend rather to pres. sj. 3 pl. **-ellsat*. Therefore, I understand the first two clauses to form a pair; the second two clauses also belong together but the shift in mood from past indicative to pres. sj. in the third conveys the idea that the purpose of the assault was to bind Cú Chulainn ‘among the forces of female wantonness’. Thus, I would translate the relevant section as: ‘and they have devastated you and they shackled you, so that they may bind you among the forces of female wantonness.’ In other words, the attack on Cú

¹⁰ The translation by Gantz (1981, 162) contains much that is purely conjectural. For other translations of this poem see Isaac 1999, 80 and Mees 2007, 21-22.

¹¹ On the etymology of *genit* see Breatnach 1994b, 196.

¹² The sense ‘binds’ seems appropriate to the context. The sense ‘takes possession of’, used by Mees, is a secondary legal usage.

Chulainn which ‘devastated’ and ‘shackled’ him was not just revenge for his initial attack on them but part of a stratagem to bind him to Fand among the forces of female lust.¹³

THE WASTING SICKNESS

The hero’s wasting sickness is usually interpreted as love sickness, although this seems to be based more on a reading of Recension A than of Recension B and *serglige* does not exclusively, or even predominantly, indicate a malady arising from passion (see *DIL* s.v.).¹⁴ He is taken to his sickbed (*dom shergligu*)¹⁵ at Emain after his beating and remains there for a year without speaking (§9). At the end of the year, Óengus son of Áed Abrat from the *síd* addresses Cú Chulainn saying that his sisters (Cú Chulainn’s two assailants) would heal him if they were with him and that Fand is in love with him (§11). This is the first time that Cú Chulainn is made aware of Fand’s desire and he reveals no reciprocal feelings. He goes to meet with Lí Ban at the spot where the original assault took place and berates her for attacking him the previous year. She defends their actions, saying *Ní du for fogail ém... do deochammárni, acht is do chuinchid for caratraid*, ‘Not to harm thee did we come... but to seek thy friendship’ (§13, ll.130-31). The intended friendship is both sexual and political as Lí Ban then informs him of Fand’s love for him as well as the offer of her hand if Cú Chulainn should agree to fight against Labraid’s enemies. At this point, Cú Chulainn may, for the first time, return Fand’s feelings although he declares that he cannot fulfil the bargain at present because he is ‘not able to fight men to-day’ (*Nímtha maith ém’, ol sé, ‘do chath fri fíru indíu’*, ll.134-5). Indeed, this may be little more than a ruse on Cú Chulainn’s part, a delaying tactic that echoes an almost identical ploy that he uses to rebuff the Morrígain’s advances during the Táin (O’Rahilly 1976, 57, ll.1851-53). Therefore, it is clear that Cú Chulainn’s illness precedes his agreement to a union with Fand and even this is a decidedly business-like affair marked by an absence of any indication of strong feelings of affection on the part of Cú Chulainn.

Cú Chulainn’s illness is notably different from other instances of *serglige*. *Aislinge Óengusso* reports that Óengus sees a beautiful woman approach him while asleep. He falls ill on account of her beauty and does not eat. She visits him every day for a year and still he does not eat. Physicians are brought to him, one of whom diagnoses excessive love (*grád écmaise*) (Shaw 1934, 46-7).¹⁶ It seems, therefore, that what is obvious to the reader, namely, that Óengus has fallen in love, is not obvious to Óengus himself and must be diagnosed by a third party. In *Tochmarc Étaíne*, Ailill Angubae falls in love with his brother’s wife, Étaín, and

¹³ There is an interesting parallel to this in the use of spells or charms to cause impotence in men as described in the law tract *Di Chethairshlicht Athgabálae* (see Borsje 2010, 180-189). Glosses on the act of *fuba n-imdai* ‘attack of the bed’ describe how a spell can be used to render a man impotent so that he cannot have sex with his wife and Borsje (2010, 180-1) suggests that the ‘third party may be a person who desires one partner of the couple or a rejected lover who tries to destroy the relationship’. Glosses on another infringement called *collud mbreithe* ‘spoiling of birth?’ also describe the use of a charm to render a man impotent (*lemad*) and to prevent him from going to bed with his wife (*nemdul cuice ‘na imda*) (Borsje 2010, 183).

¹⁴ Layzer analyses Cú Chulainn’s subsequent illness in terms of his mundane responsibilities including both his martial obligations towards the Ulstermen and his marital obligations towards Eithne (Layzer 2001, 141-147, 178-179).

¹⁵ This short section is ascribed by Thurneysen and Dillon to Recension A but is written in the hand of H.

¹⁶ See eDIL s.v. *écmaise* and O’Brien 1956, 179.

becomes ill as a result. Ailill gazes upon Étaín continually and, we are told, *is deascaidh seirci sirshillidh*, ‘gazing is a token of love’ (Bergin & Best 1938, 164-5 §3). He feels guilty on account of the illicit and improper nature of his love and falls sick. The physician who treats him declares that he is suffering from one of two possible illnesses which no doctor can cure, namely, the pang of jealousy (*idu eoid*) or the pang of love (*ida sheirce*) (Bergin & Best 1938, 164 §4). However, unlike *Aislinge Óengusso*, it is clear that Ailill understood his feelings to the point where he felt guilty for harbouring them, although a third party seems to be necessary to interpret his illness to other people.

Lóeg’s *roscad*, as we have seen, suggests that the women subdued Cú Chulainn so that they might bind him to their own sexual intemperance. In other words, they attacked him in order to subjugate him to their own desires. Moreover, we have seen that Cú Chulainn does not express any reciprocal desire at any stage during his *serglige* and that even his apparent acquiescence, if it is indeed a submission, is expressed in terms of a legal contract rather than a bond of passion. This suggests that the author of Recension B took a view of *serglige* that it was not a state of rapturous love-sickness to which we have become accustomed in other tales but that it was aggressively induced by Otherworld visitants. Ultimately, the only way for Cú Chulainn to break this spell was to comply with the bargain and yield to Fand’s proposal of sexual union. When this theme is later developed in Recension A, Cú Chulainn has fallen deeply in love with her but that does not negate the fact that such feelings are notable for their absence in the earlier version.

LOVE

We find here in *SCC* a very different portrayal of love and desire from that which we witness in earlier love tales such as *Aislinge Óengusso* (Shaw 1934), *Tochmarc Étaíne* (Bergin & Best 1938) and *Echtrae Chonnlai* (McCone 2000) in which the woman arrives on the scene and captures a man’s heart with her striking beauty, causing him to fall ill or cease eating.¹⁷ Proactive, resolute female lovers are also common in early Irish literature—Deirdriu in *Longes mac nUislenn* (Hull 1949), Becfhola in *Tochmarc Becfhola* (Bhreathnach 1984), Rónán’s young bride in *Fingal Rónáin* (Greene 1955) and Sín in *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca*—but even the most transgressive of them use guile rather than force. Becfhola entreated and yearned for Díarmait’s foster-son for a long time (*Baí oca guidi oca thothlugud cén máir*), eventually persuading him to tryst with her, although his people dissuaded him in the end (Bhreathnach 1984, §4). The young queen in *Fingal Rónáin* turns her attention to Rónán’s son and pursues him for a long time, eventually alleging with devastating consequences that Máel Fhothartaig had been importuning her. Fand is almost entirely in a league of her own, an aggressive suitor who dominates the hero with acts of extreme violence. Cú Chulainn’s *serglige* is not caused by his love for Fand, for he appears to feel none, but by a debility that she imposes upon him in order to subdue and control him. As Lóeg observes, the wasting sickness enables the women to ensnare him in their sexual dissipation.

¹⁷ For an overview of love in early Irish literature see Bitel 1996, esp. 44-65.

It is perhaps noteworthy that Cú Chulainn's sexual encounters in *Tochmarc Emire* are frequently characterised by violence both by and against him (see Ó hUiginn 2013). *SCC* provides an interesting inversion of this plot type with Cú Chulainn now being the subject of female violence and rendered utterly powerless, but this is not the first time that a woman has tried to dominate him physically. An interesting analogue is provided by the Morrígain's failed attempt to seduce Cú Chulainn in the Táin where she appears as 'a young woman of surpassing beauty, clad in clothes of many colours' (*co n-aca Cú in n-ócben chuci co n-étuch cach datha impe *7 delb roderscaigthe furri*) and explains that she has fallen in love with him on account of his fame (O'Rahilly 1976, 57 ll.1846-7; see Borsje 2007, 87-8). He rejects her, saying that he is ill and in no condition to meet with a woman. When this does not dissuade her, he asserts that he has not come on the Táin seeking the arse of a woman (*ní ar thóin mná dano gabus-sa inso*, O'Rahilly 1976, 57 l.1855). Subsequently the two struggle with each other at the ford, with the Morrígain taking on the form of an eel, a wolf and a cow, and Cú Chulainn overcomes her. Although there is a battle between the two that is reminiscent in some ways of the beating in *SCC*, it is portrayed as the vengeance of a jilted Morrígain.

The author of Recension B presents us with a distinctive view of love, therefore. The women of Ulster are depicted as foolish harlots, unfaithful to their husbands and in thrall to Cú Chulainn. Eithne stands in marked contrast to them for by her own assertion she loves none other than Cú Chulainn. She is selfless, accepting the humiliation of her husband's presentation of gifts to all the women of Ulster but her and symbolically remaining at his feet while ill (*SCC* §10). Despite her husband's slight, she provides good advice to him, appealing to him not to hunt the birds that he seeks for her because she discerns the danger that they represent. Fand, abandoned by her own husband, sets out to win Cú Chulainn's love but instead of capturing him with her beauty,¹⁸ she ferociously beats him and leaves him in a terrible wasting sickness. The *serglige* which in other warriors is a manifestation of the strength and depth of their love for their lover is here transformed into something quite different. Cú Chulainn suffers the same symptoms of other love-struck men but he does not appear to be in love. The *serglige* does not emanate from within himself, therefore, but is depicted as being imposed on him from the outside. His turmoil and torpidity are the result of a beating delivered by his would-be lover. The tale, therefore, seems to deliver a stark warning about love, and more particularly the love of women. Love is an assault upon men that is intended to deprive them of their vitality and to imprison them within the bonds of female lust. Women are not docile beauties who capture men's hearts with their charm or their guile, but they are active agents who can violently ensnare even the most powerful of men and rob them of their masculine vigour.¹⁹

¹⁸ H's text tells us little about Fand's appearance but her rich clothing (§8) and her wealth (§11) would lead us to believe that she was considered a beautiful woman. We are told in a gloss on her name, which is interpreted as 'tear', that she was so-called because of her purity and beauty: *Ara glaini ro ainmniged disi sin, *7 ara cóimí, ar ní boí isin bith frisa samailte chena*, 'For her purity and for her beauty she was given that name, for there was nothing else in the world to which she might be compared.' (§16 ll.173-4).

¹⁹ We are reminded here to some extent of Sín in *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* who brings about the death of Muirchertach, king of Tara. The differences, however, are significant. Sín uses her beauty and sexual allure to cause Muirchertach to fall in love with her as in other love stories but the purpose here is to exact revenge on

The danger posed by Otherworld women is clearly a concern and men need protection from it. This appears also to be in evidence during Lóeg's first journey to the Otherworld. Cú Chulainn is unable to undertake the journey because he is still ill, so Lóeg goes in his stead. While he is there LÍ Ban warns him that he will not leave that place alive unless a woman offers him protection (*acht manit ainge ben*) (§14 ll.146). The protection of a man by a woman is, of course, socially aberrant and Lóeg remarks: *Níbo ed as mó ro gnáthaigsem dúncus tráthsa... banchomarchi*, 'A woman's protection is not what I have been accustomed to up to now' (§14 ll.147-8). LÍ Ban laments that Cú Chulainn himself had not made the journey to which Lóeg somewhat comically replies *Bád maith limsa dano combad hé no beth and*, 'I should be glad if he were [there]' (§14 ll. 149-50). This deliberate contrasting of the two worlds, that of Lóeg and that of LÍ Ban, suggests that mortal men have much to fear in the Otherworld and clearly recalls the defeat of Cú Chulainn at the hands of the two women. The elevated position of women is further underlined in the subsequent welcome given to Lóeg when he enters the house of women: *Fo chen duit, a Loíg, di ág neich las tudchad ocus ó tudchad, *7 dit dáig fesni*, 'Welcome to thee, Lóeg, for the sake of her with whom thou art come, and of him from whom thou art come, and for thy own sake' (§16 ll.166-7). The hierarchy here is noteworthy, with the female guardian placed at the higher end of the scale and ranging through Cú Chulainn, who has sent him, down to himself, the envoy. Even the king, Labraid, greets him in the name of 'the woman with whom thou art come' (*fo bíth na mná las tánac*, §20 l.226).²⁰

II

WIVES AND LOVERS

Findon (1997, 107-134) locates the tale within the context of marriage law and particularly the debate on monogamy, arguing that the tale challenges 'the idea that [a husband] has the legal right to have relationships with more than one woman at a time' (ibid. 111). She suggests that it was reshaped by H in the twelfth century to reflect the views of marriage being propagated by the English and continental Church (1997, 111-12), but in fact, H's interpolations towards the end of the tale have little to do with marriage and deal primarily with issues of war (particularly §§35-8) and are otherwise accepted as deriving from a pre-twelfth century version (Recension B). Significantly, H adds nothing of significance to the key portion of the tale dealing with the confrontation between Cú Chulainn, Emer and Fand (§§39-47) which is written in the hand of the eleventh-century scribe, M. We cannot know how the relationship between Cú Chulainn, Eithne and Fand was resolved in the older version used by H but it is clear that M's version was already intensely concerned with the conflict arising from and within the Cú Chulainn/Emer/Fand triangle even before H's interventions. While a great deal of information about early Irish law relating to marriage has been gleaned

him for the slaughter of her family (Williams 2011). I am grateful to Elizabeth Boyle for drawing this distinctive parallel to my attention.

²⁰ In Recension A, Lóeg's fear seems to be much diminished and he merely reports that the beauty of the place and its women was so great that had he not left in great haste he would have been rendered helpless (*hétréorach*, §34). *Étréorach*, which means literally 'directionless', is particularly germane for a charioteer such as Lóeg and echoes Cú Chulainn's loss of vigour. The danger is still present, but it comes from the inescapable allure of the place rather than from a physical threat from its women.

from legal tracts, much less is known about practice in relation to marriage, polygyny and divorce.²¹ I hope to show in the following analysis that *SCC* provides some insight into the author's thinking on these matters.

When Recension A picks up the story, Cú Chulainn rises from his sickbed and travels to the Otherworld where he fights against and vanquishes Labraid's enemies. After the battle, he sleeps with Fand and stays with her for a month (§39) after which he leaves to return home, agreeing to meet her at Ibar Cinn Trácht, modern-day Newry, Co. Down. Meanwhile, Emer finds out about Fand's planned arrival and stages an ambush. Fand notices Emer and her companions, armed and lying in wait to attack her, and warns Lóeg in the first *roscad* of their approach. In the next *roscad*, Cú Chulainn urges Fand not to worry and asks her to step into his chariot where he can watch over her, assuring her that Emer will not dare to attack her there (*SCC* §40). Then Cú Chulainn addresses Emer directly:

Not sechnaimsea, a ben, amal sechnas cách a chárail.

'I avoid thee, woman, as every man avoids his yoke.' (*SCC* §41 l.702).

Ostensibly, Cú Chulainn's statement relates to the potential combat – he will not engage in physical combat with Emer – and this is borne out by his subsequent refusal to strike her (§41 ll.704-5). However, there seems to be a deliberate double meaning here. The word *cárail* 'yoke' is particularly loaded. It denotes specifically part of the mechanism for the yoking together of two working animals to form a pair and it is used here metaphorically of the bond of marriage.²² Cú Chulainn's assertion, therefore, seems to intimate that no man wishes to be tied exclusively to a single woman. It is not that he is opposed to sexual coupling, which he indulges in freely, but rather to an exclusive binding relationship. In other words, he is asserting his right not to be yoked to Emer alone. Later, he complains, *cid arná léicfideá damsa mo denus i ndáil mná*, 'why shouldst thou not allow me a while of trysting?' (*SCC* §42, ll.711-12). The word *denus* means 'a period of time', often 'day', and the phrase *denus i ndáil mná* must be understood as a night or nights spent in a woman's bed, which in this case, as I shall argue below, must be understood as a concubine.

Cú Chulainn's refusal to be yoked to a single woman, or at least Emer's objection to this particular liaison, reminds us of his multiple sexual liaisons, many of which are described in *Tochmarc Emire* (van Hamel 1933, 20-68). In that tale, Cú Chulainn and Emer promise to remain faithful to each other until his return from his quest in Alba, but although Emer stays true to her promise, even after her father has betrothed her to a Munster king against her will, Cú Chulainn engages in a number of couplings, most notably with Úathach, daughter of Scáthach, with Scáthach herself, and with Scáthach's enemy, Aífe, who bears him a son. The incongruity of the hero's promise and his action is viewed by modern scholars as hypocritical, but it is remarkable that it passes without comment in the text. However, Cú

²¹ See, for example, Candon 2006.

²² *DIL* s.v. *córait* has 'Used of the fastening or yoking together of two working animals, fastening, yoke... Hence freq. of the animals themselves pair, brace, couple'. The acc. sg. of *carae* seems to be ruled out by the presence in the manuscript of an accent on the first *a*, although the author may have intended a pun on this word. In other words, every man avoids his friend (reading *carait*) in combat and every man avoids his yoke (*cárail*) in marriage.

Chulainn's journey to Alba is frequently seen as a proxy for the Otherworld, and we may assume that it is the sexual mores of the Otherworld that apply here. As Miller (2014, 10) notes in another context, Cú Chulainn finds himself in Britain 'alone in an alternate world that plays by different rules'.²³ Cú Chulainn's promise of fidelity should not, therefore, be dismissed as mere duplicity on his part but as another manifestation of the sinless Otherworld.²⁴

Ó hUiginn has shown that *Tochmarc Emire* is concerned with the nature of marriage and that Cú Chulainn's liaisons correspond to forms of informal sexual union which have legal consequences (Ó hUiginn 2013, 27-9). His rape of Aífe, for example, is a 'union through rape' (*lánamnas éicne*), although even in this he fails to take responsibility for the offspring of their intercourse as required by Irish law. In another episode, he forces Scáthach at the point of a sword to betroth her daughter, Úathach, to him and compels her to pay her bride-price (*tindscrae*) (Ó hUiginn 2013, 27-8). The betrothal and the payment of a dowry gives this something of the appearance of a legitimate marriage but of course the betrothal is extracted under threat of violent action and Cú Chulainn himself does not provide the dowry but extorts it from the bride's family.²⁵

That the redactor of the long recension of *Tochmarc Emire* was concerned not just with types of sexual union but more particularly with Cú Chulainn's failure to adhere to his vow of fidelity may be suggested by the daughter of Rúad episode, which is interpolated into this version, in which our hero encounters Derbforgaill, daughter of Rúad (van Hamel 1933, 61 §81; Ó hUiginn 2013, 34-6). Having saved her from the Fomoiri to whom she was to be sacrificed, her father offers her in marriage to Cú Chulainn and promises to pay the bride-price himself. Cú Chulainn refuses to take her immediately but instructs them to send her to Ireland in a year's time. It is noteworthy that Cú Chulainn, although agreeing to the betrothal, does not sleep with her. When she does arrive in Ireland in the form of a bird, Cú Chulainn fails to recognise her and shoots her with his sling. Realising his error, he sucks the stone from her body but accidentally swallows some of her blood and declares that they can no longer be married (van Hamel 1933, 62 §83). As Ó hUiginn (2013, 42-3) notes, he would have been prevented from marrying her because of their supposed consanguinity resulting from his drinking of her blood, but conveniently this leaves the path open for him to once again attempt to marry Emer.²⁶ Cú Chulainn's restraint, both on Rúad's island and back home in Ireland, stands in marked contrast to his sexual behaviour in Britain and it is possible that

²³ Cf. Carey (1989, 33) who observes that when Cú Chulainn leaves Ireland, he also leaves his Cycle and 'enters a world of wonder tale and romance'.

²⁴ Sex in the Otherworld is not invariably viewed as sinless. In *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind ocus Tochmarc Delbchaime ingine Morgain*, Bécuma Cneisgeal is expelled from the Otherworld for having extra-marital sex (Best 1907, 150 §3). I am grateful to Damian McManus for this reference.

²⁵ It bears some similarity to the 'union of a man visiting' (*lánamnas fir thathightheo*) in which a man engages in sexual intercourse with a woman in her home with the knowledge and consent of her kin (Kelly, 1988, 70), although there is no suggestion here that this kind of irregular arrangement is intended in this case. It is quite common for warriors to visit lovers in their travels. In a story about Finn in Cormac's Glossary, we are told that Finn had a certain woman (*ben aurdalta*) in every mountain range and great wood that he used to frequent (*Búi bean do Luignib la Find arōn ém cach roilbe *7 cach rofid nogñāthaiged Find cona fēin, nobīth ben aurdalta ar a chind in cach thīr ba nessam dō bēus*) (Meyer 1913, 87 §1018).

²⁶ For a review of the literature on this subject see Ingridsdotter 2009, 21-23.

the author of this episode is negotiating Cú Chulainn's decontamination before his reintroduction to Irish society and his marriage to Emer. Rúad's island occupies a liminal space between Scotland and Ireland in which, rather than attacking and raping women as he does in Alba, we witness Cú Chulainn rescuing a damsel in distress and refusing to indulge himself with her. As we have seen, in journeying to Alba he has entered another world that plays by different rules and so it might be said that on the island of Rúad he begins his re-entry and reintegration into the Ulster Cycle and into the society represented therein. The timing appears to be quite deliberate for he asks for Derbforgaill to be sent to him at the end of the year. This allows him to fight in the Táin, after which he meets with and finally rejects Derbforgaill, thereby completing his reintegration which he had begun with her redemption from the Fomoiri. Thus, the daughter of Rúad episode may function as a bridge between the licentiousness of Alba and the normative mores of Ulster.

The narrative of *Tochmarc Emire* concludes with a further threat to the fidelity pact, this time from Conchobar's *ius primae noctis* (van Hamel 1933, 64-5 §§88-90) but this too is successfully negotiated without loss of face for anyone involved. The final line of the story (before the anomalous introduction of a poem on the boyhood troop of Ulster) is a notice that Cú Chulainn slept with Emer and 'they never parted after that until they both died' (my translation: *níro scarsat iar suidiu co fúaratar bás dib línaib*, van Hamel 1933, 65 §90). This is almost certainly significant, returning us to that original commitment to be faithful to each other before Cú Chulainn had set out for Alba. Despite all the trials and temptations that he experienced on his quest, Cú Chulainn returned intact to Emer and remained loyal to her, we are assured, until his death. The events of SCC present another enormous challenge to his devotion to Emer, and the only occasion on which Emer needs to be jealous of another woman, but one which he eventually succeeds in overcoming.

Returning to the love triangle in SCC, I don't think it has previously been noted that Emer is complicit in the development of Cú Chulainn's relationship with Fand. It is Emer who rouses him from his slumber and sends him towards Fand in the first place. She chides him for lying in his sickbed 'for love of a woman' (*laigi fri bangrád*) (SCC §30 l.389), after which he goes to meet Lí Ban at Airbe Roír (§31 ll.415-17). He has lain ill for over a year by this stage and Emer appears to be the only person capable of successfully directing him towards his cure, even if that involves sending him into the arms of another woman. So, we may ask, what is it that causes Emer later to set an ambush for Fand in an attempt to kill her? O'Leary observes that 'what she finds so demeaning is the publicity with which he has favoured Fann over her; when his infidelity is long past or has occurred far away and thus out of the public eye, as in *Aided Óenfhir Aífe*, she behaves with the equanimity that her culture apparently would have expected' (O'Leary 1987, 38). As Charles-Edwards (2000, 105) observes of shame, 'what matters in the end about publicity is what ones knows that others know', and Emer rebukes Cú Chulainn for humiliating her in front of the women of Ulster: '*Ceist trá,*' ar Emer, '*cid fódrúair latsu, a Chú Culaínd, mo dímiádsa fíad andrib ilib in chúicid *7 fíad andrib ilib na Hérend *7 fíad áes enig archena?*', 'But say,' said Emer, 'what caused thee, Cú Chulainn, to dishonour me before the women of the province and before the many women of Ireland, and before all honourable men?' (SCC §41). It seems quite clear, therefore, that Emer tolerates

Cú Chulainn sleeping with other women, at least in the Otherworld, but to bring one back to Ulster as his concubine is a different matter.

Cú Chulainn's relationship with Fand appears to be more than a casual relationship and seems to have the social and legal sanction of a recognised union. Recension A clearly indicates that Fand is promised to Cú Chulainn on condition that he aid Labraid in battle (§13). This is a betrothal in all but name and we may reasonably assume that his military service is equivalent to the required bride-price. This formal recognition is not reiterated in Recension B but Fand's eager anticipation of Cú Chulainn is repeatedly stated and Cú Chulainn sleeps with Fand immediately after he has performed his military obligations (§39). That their relationship was legally recognised is suggested by the fact that they then remain together for a month, apparently with the full knowledge and consent of the king, before Cú Chulainn returns to Ireland. Finally, it may be significant that Cú Chulainn takes Fand under his protection when she is threatened by Emer. Specifically, he invites her into his chariot into his presence:

*'Nít ágara,' ar Cú Chulaind, '*7 nícon tora etir. Tairsiu isin creit cumachta lasin suidi ngrianda form dreichsea fodéin, ar do thesarcoinsiu ar andrib ilib imdaib hi cetharaird Ulad, ar cíá nos báigea ingen Fhorcaill a hucht a comalta in gním co cumachta, bés ní lim lamathar.'*

“Do not fear!” said Cú Chulainn, “and she will never reach thee. Come into the mighty car with the shining seat before me, for thy protection against many women in the four quarters of Ulster. For though Forgall's daughter, surrounded by her companions, threatens a mighty deed, perhaps she will not dare with me.” (SCC §40)

In marriage, the protection of the woman is transferred from the father to the husband and so this act of protection in *SCC* seems to be more than a mere defensive procedure but rather a formal affirmation of their relationship. It is echoed later in the same passage when Emer reminds Cú Chulainn that she had placed herself under his protection (*is fóit chliith tánacsa *7 fo ollbríg do tharisen*, ‘it is under thy guard I came, and under the might of thy protection’, §41 ll.708-9).²⁷

Emer subsequently turns the conversation towards divorce: *ar cíá not báigea úall ollimresan, bés nípad rith latsu mo lécunsa, a gillai, cíá no tríalltá*, ‘and although the pride of mighty conflicts puff thee up, perhaps thou shouldst not find it easy to leave me, lad, if thou shouldst try’ (§41 ll.709-10). The key word here is *lécun* which means ‘leaves, abandons’ and is frequently used in relation to repudiation in marriage (*DIL* s.v. *léicid*). The verb *léicid* is used four times in this exchange and is clearly an important concept in the author's schema.²⁸

²⁷ Greene and O'Connor render the phrase ‘the main power of your guarantee’ and Gantz translates ‘the great power of your guarantee’ (1981, 174). The word *tairisiu* means ‘faith, trust, confidence’ and ‘faithfulness, loyalty’ and denotes some kind of compact or contract in the Laws although it does not appear to be used in relation to marriage (see *DIL* s.v.). The sense here is something like ‘(I came) under the great force of your faithfulness’.

²⁸ It is noteworthy that it is invariably used in passive constructions here. Although the law allows for women to divorce men, they do not here themselves divorce their husband but are divorced by him. Cf. *Ros léci Manandán*, ‘Manannán... has left her’ (SCC §13 l.132).

According to early Irish law, a husband could divorce his wife for a number of reasons including unfaithfulness, abortion, killing her child or dishonouring her husband, and a couple could also divorce by mutual consent (Kelly, 1988, 75; Jaski 1996, 31). A woman could divorce her husband in various circumstances, most relevantly in the current context if he took another woman into the marital bed (Kelly 2014, 3-4), and it may well be the case that Emer sees the appearance of Fand as a provocation for her to sue for divorce. Despite her evident dishonouring, however, she is not minded to pursue that avenue, proclaiming that divorce might not be as easy (or perhaps rather ‘profitable’) ²⁹ as Cú Chulainn assumes.

However, it is clear that divorce is not what Cú Chulainn has in mind. As we have seen, he questions why he cannot be allowed to sleep with Fand for a period of time (*denus*), which must be understood as a night or nights spent in another woman’s bed. That Cú Chulainn is not contemplating divorce is further suggested by his concluding remarks in the same passage when he addresses Emer: *ní faigebasu curaid cáin créchtach cathbúadach bádam fiúsa*, ‘thou shalt not find a hero, handsome, wounding in conflict, triumphant, who is equal to me’ (§42 l.718). The intended tone of this line is questionable but it seems unlikely that he is taunting her with the stark fact that she will never find a partner as good as him for nowhere else in the dialogue, or elsewhere in the tale, does Cú Chulainn show a lack of respect for her. Rather, it appears to respond directly to Emer’s previous assertion of the possible detrimental effect of divorce on Cú Chulainn, and seems to be an argument in favour of her remaining with him in the new marriage arrangement that includes Fand. Instead of suing for divorce, he is urging Emer not to divorce him. He is attempting to persuade her that her best interest lies in their continued, but modified, union.

An interesting aspect of this dialogue is Cú Chulainn’s emphasis on the virtues of Fand who, in Cú Chulainn’s own words, bears all the characteristics of an ideal wife:

Is sí in glan genmnaid gel gasta dingbála do rí ilchrothach ind ingensin do thonnaib dar leraib lánmoraib co ndeilb ocus éosc ocus sóerchenél, co ndrúni ocus lám da ocus lámthorud co céill ocus chonn ocus chobsaidecht co n-immad ech ocus bótháinte. Ar ní fil fo nim ní bad tol ria coimchéile ná dingned cíá no comgellta.

This woman is pure and chaste and bright and clever, a girl worthy of a victorious king from beyond the waves of mighty seas, with beauty and grace and good breeding. She knows embroidery and crafts and household skills. She has sense and wisdom and character, and many horses and herds of cattle and there is nothing under heaven that she would not do that a noble husband desired of her if it were agreed on’.³⁰

²⁹ The idiom *is rith la* does not occur elsewhere and its meaning is somewhat conjectural. Dillon, taking it as an idiomatic use of *rith* ‘course’, notes that the sense should be ‘your attempt to abandon me may not succeed’ and this is accepted by subsequent translators. *DIL* s.v. *rith* suggests that it is connected to the sense ‘interest’ which would suggest a translation ‘perhaps my abandonment would not profit you’. Given what transpires later in this section, I am inclined to accept the latter interpretation.

³⁰ I follow Greene & O’Connor (1990, 131, 133) here whose resolution of the text is superior. The equivalent text in Dillon’s edition is at §42.

Beauty, chastity, and good breeding are the classic qualities of a good wife (O’Leary 1987, 34-6) and, of course, the very qualities associated with Emer. Fand also possesses considerable independent wealth for she has ‘many horses and herds of cattle’ on the basis of which, under other circumstances, she could have entered a ‘union of joint property’ (*lánamnus comthinchuir*) with Cú Chulainn and less probably a ‘union of a man on woman-property’ (*lánamnus mná for bantinchur*) (Kelly 1988, 70-71). However, there can hardly be any doubt that Emer is to be regarded as his legally recognised wife, despite the irregularities in the establishment of that union,³¹ so Fand would have been considered in terms of early Irish law as a concubine (*adaltrach*) with a concomitant diminution in her status (see Kelly 1988, 71; 2014, 3-4).

Indeed, Cú Chulainn refers to Fand’s subordinate status in his argument with Emer. It seems from *Cáin Lánamna* that a concubine has some limited rights over the disposal of property but the text of *SCC* may suggest that Fand is willing to forego even these rights.³² According to Greene & O’Connor’s edition cited above, Cú Chulainn advises Emer that Fand would do anything he desired ‘if it were agreed on’ (*cía no comgellta*). Although Greene & O’Connor print *coimchéile*, they more closely follow *LU*, which has *cóemchéile*, in translating ‘noble husband’. Dillon unjustifiably amends to *comchéile* which he translates in the vocabulary as ‘joint spouse’ and so would make Fand subservient to Emer whereas Greene & O’Connor’s interpretation has her deferring to Cú Chulainn.³³ Both editions also differ in their understanding of the final phrase *cía no comgellta*. Dillon takes the verbal form as 2 sg. past subj. (*SCC* pp. 43, 56; ‘if thou wouldst join in a bond’, Dillon 1953b, 71) whereas Greene & O’Connor take it as passive ‘if it were agreed on’. With the falling together of final unstressed short vowels in Middle Irish as schwa, the past subj. 2 sg. and passive sg. would have been formally indistinguishable. According to Breatnach (1994a, 291, 312-13), the long vowel is more widely attested in the passive in MSS of the Middle Irish period but we also find evidence of a long vowel in the 2 sg. There is little to choose between the two but we do have a long vowel in past subj. 2 sg. in *no tríallta* in the previous paragraph (§41 l.710) so I am more inclined to take it as 2 sg. here. Thus, we may understand this line as an assurance from Cú Chulainn that Fand would submit to him in all matters should Emer consent to the arrangement. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Fand would be in a much reduced position within Cú Chulainn’s household despite her former high status and considerable wealth.

³¹ Emer fulfils all the requirements of a bride of equal status according to *Tochmarc Emire*: she was the only maiden of all the girls in Ireland who was worthy for him, we are told, and she was fitting ‘in age and form and lineage’ (*ar aís *7 cruth *7 cenél*, van Hamel 1933, §10). Although Cú Chulainn abducts her (§86), he does so only because Forgall has previously tricked him into undertaking the perilous expedition to the land of Scáthach, believing that the young warrior would meet his death there. This chicanery might be understood to constitute in itself a transgression against the norms of betrothal thereby permitting Cú Chulainn to operate outside them as well. It may be noted that Conchobar also agrees to pay her bride-price (*tindsraí*) in the *ius primae noctis* episode (§90).

³² *Is cor a chor ind fhir sech in mbein acht reic étaig *7 biid *7 reic bó *7 caerach, mad ben airnadma nab cétmuinter*, ‘the husband’s contract is a valid contract without the wife[’s consent] except selling clothing and food and selling cows and sheep, if she may be a *ben airnadma* who is not a primary wife’ (Eska 2010, 196-7 §21). As she is not the *cétmuinter*, the woman in question here must be an *adaltrach airnadma* ‘betrothed concubine’.

³³ Quite apart from the weight of the MS evidence, there is no evidence of which I am aware for ‘joint spouses’. A concubine is hardly to be considered a joint spouse and this very line implies that they would not be equal but that Emer would occupy a superior position.

Emer responds to Cú Chulainn's proposal by shifting from the directly confrontational assertion of her loss to a more strident assertion of her own worth, declaring that the woman to whom he clings (*dia lenai*) may be no better than her (§43 ll.719). She then criticises him for not appreciating what he already has, suggesting that, infatuated by the virtues of Fand, Cú Chulainn has forgotten that the virtues he attributes to Fand are the very qualities associated with Emer. Indeed, Emer now cuts to the heart of the matter by asserting in a memorable and striking line: *is álaind cech nderg, is gel cach núa, is caín cech ard, is serb cach gnáth*, 'everything red is beautiful, everything new is bright, everything unattainable is lovely, everything familiar is bitter' (§43 ll.720-1).³⁴ Emer's words here directly echo the opening line of a single stanza written in the margin of *LL*:

*Gel cech nua – sásad nglé! | utmall álcha ócduine,
áilli bretha bíte im sheirc, | millsí bríathra fir thochmairc.*

'Everything new is neat – cheers! A young man is changeable in his desires, lovely are decisions about love and sweet the words of a man who comes wooing' (Greene & O'Connor 1990, 203; = *LL* ii p. 448).

Men are fickle in their love, just as Cú Chulainn is here, switching his desire from Emer to the latest thing to come his way. His head has been turned by Fand's bright colours and her youthfulness. By contrast, he has grown used to Emer and has taken her for granted. Familiarity breeds contempt. Emer reinforces her message, declaring: *Cáid cech n-écmais, is faill cech n-aichnid, co festar cach n-éolas*, 'everything absent is perfect, everything known is neglected, until all knowledge is known' (*SCC* §43 ll.721-2; Greene & O'Connor 1990, 133). The word *écmais* is clearly linked to the concept of *grád écmaise*, the all-consuming love for someone, often at a distance, which is a common conceit in early Irish literature.³⁵ Cú Chulainn has become enthralled by the unknown, by what is distant, while overlooking the merits of the familiar near to home. In the final phrase, *co festar cach n-éolas*, 'until all knowledge is known', Emer insinuates that Cú Chulainn will continue to shift his allegiances until he has worked his way through all desirable women. This kind of desire can never be satisfied and will always leave the man wanting something new.

Having stated the case in general principles, Emer now makes her argument more personal, focussing directly on their own relationship and Cú Chulainn's desire for her. She reminds him that she had previously lived with him in dignity and could do so again if only he wished: '*A gillai, ar sí, ro bámar ní fecht co cátaid acut, *7 no bemmís dorísi diambad áil duiti*', 'Lad... thou hadst us once in dignity together, and we should be so again if thou didst desire it' (*SCC* §43 ll.722-3). This suggestion is a turning point and Cú Chulainn immediately declares: '*Dar ar mbréthir trá, ar sé, isatt áilsiu damsa *7 bidat áil hi céin bat béo*', 'On my word... I desire thee, and I shall desire thee as long as thou livest', §43 ll.724-5). This stands in marked contrast to Emer's previous assertions that he is being fickle and demonstrates his enduring affection for her. The familiar is, indeed, revered and the old will

³⁴ Dillons translation (1953b, 71) has accidentally omitted part of this sentence and so I follow Greene & O'Connor's translation (1990, 133) here.

³⁵ For a discussion of the term see references above at n.16.

be embraced again. The key word in this exchange appears to be *cátaid* which *DIL* defines as ‘dignity, honour, esteem; value’. Thus, her appeal to Cú Chulainn is not on the basis of sexual attraction, beauty or wealth but dignity and respect. Emer is reminding him, while he is surrounded by the temptation of the new lover, that they had a marriage in which she was a wife worthy of honour and esteem. The honourable wife appears to be what the author considers to be the essence and purpose of a good marriage. However, although Cú Chulainn immediately renews his commitment to and desire for Emer now, his continued love for Fand is starkly evident later in the tale when he becomes inconsolable and goes mad after her departure (§47).

Upon hearing Cú Chulainn’s declaration of renewed affection towards Emer, Fand immediately interjects: *Mo lécudsa didiu*, ‘Leave me then’ (§44 l.726). The effect of Fand’s surrender is to open up a dialogue for the first time between her and Emer. Despite all that has preceded this, Emer responds by offering a divorce to Cú Chulainn saying *Is córu mo lécudsa*, ‘It were more just to leave me’ (§44 l.726). This is an extraordinary statement, particularly as she chooses the adjective *cóir* ‘right, just, proper’, but this may refer back to her earlier assertion that their separation might not profit Cú Chulainn (§41 ll.709-10). It is clear now that she believes that Cú Chulainn would be no better off with Fand than he was with her and that Fand’s beauty and freshness will pass. Nevertheless, the situation is so humiliating for her that she feels compelled to seek a divorce as was her legal right – it is more just from her point of view because she has been denied the dignity of a faithful and monogamous husband without interruption from a concubine. Notwithstanding Emer’s claim, Fand reiterates her avowal that it is she who should be left (*messi léicfidir and*, §44 l. 727) and explains: *is mé ro báeglaiged ó chéin* ‘for it is I who was endangered just now’ (§44 ll.727-8; my trans.). This of course refers to Emer’s threatened physical attack on her (§§40-41) from which she is initially protected by Cú Chulainn. The implication seems to be that she can no longer rely on Cú Chulainn’s protection, an essential function of marriage as we have seen, and that in such circumstances it is more sensible for her to retreat, regardless of the public humiliation that will ensue. We may recall Derbforgaill’s horrific and bloody death at the hands of the Ulsterwomen in *Aided Derbforgaill*. Although she was wedded to Lugaid Ríab nDerg, he could not protect her from the jealousy of the women of Ulster (Ingridsdotter 2009, 82-3).

The tale presents us, therefore, with two contrasting positions championed by Cú Chulainn on the one hand and Emer on the other. Cú Chulainn appears as an advocate of concubinage, a position that Emer vehemently opposes. Cú Chulainn can appear to the modern reader as rather dim-witted in his failure to comprehend Emer’s objections because we instinctively understand her position, but we must remember that he is not proposing something preposterously novel here but is representing a legally established arrangement. He fails to understand Emer’s objections not because he is particularly obtuse or insensitive but because he views concubinage as normal and natural. Indeed, for the medieval audience used to the practice of concubinage, at least in stories, it is Emer’s stance rather than that of her husband that might have seemed out of step.

As Findon has observed, we get an insight here into a female view of the world that is rarely witnessed in medieval literature. This is hardly an accident and I would suggest that the positive depiction of women is a deliberate contribution to the primary theme of marital stability. Emer is indisputably a good wife and it is only after her intervention that Cú Chulainn is raised from his sickbed. When Lóeg finally goes to bring her to Cú Chulainn's bedside, she chides him for failing to cure his master:

'Olc duitsiu, a gilli,' for sí, 'ar is tú taithiges in síd cen fheib íca do thigerna d'agbáil lat. Trúag d'Ultaib,' for sí, 'cen shirthina máríca. Diambad Conchobur credbaigthe, nó Fergus níthastar súan, nó Conall Cernach tabsath créchta, is Cú Chulainn cobarthe.'

'Ill of thee, lad,' said she, 'for thou dost visit fairy-land, not to find means of healing thy master! Unhappy for the Ulstermen not to seek his healing! If Conchobar were wasting away, or if sleep should overpower Fergus, or Conall Cernach should draw wounds upon himself, it is: "Cú Chulainn, help!" (SCC §29 ll.333-7)

She then goes to Emain and rebukes Cú Chulainn himself: *Is mebul duit... laigi fri bangrád, uair dogénad galar duit sírligi*, 'Shame for thee... to lie for love of a woman, for long lying will make thee sick', and calls on him to get out of his bed (§30 ll.389-90). Her words are effective for he immediately rises from his slumber and 'brought his hand across his face, and put from him his faintness and his heaviness' (*dorat láim dara agid *7 ro chuir a mertnigi *7 a thromdacht de*, §31).

Findon (1997, 132) notes the lack of a misogynistic tone in the tale and in particular the remarkably sympathetic portrayal of Fand. Fand is far from the typical scarlet woman in Recension A.³⁶ We recall that she has been abandoned by her husband, Manannán (SCC §13 ll.132-3), a feature which finds a remarkable parallel in a letter from Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Toirdelbach Ua Briain in 1074:

In regno uestro quisque pro arbitrio suo legitime sibi copulatam uxorem nulla canonica causa interueniente relinquit et aliam quamlibet, seu sibi uel relicte uxori consanguinitate propinquam siue quam alius simili improbitate deseruit, maritali seu fornicaria lege punienda sibi temeritate coniungit.

'In your kingdom a man abandons at his own discretion and without any grounds in canon law the wife who is lawfully married to him, not hesitating to form a criminal alliance – by the law of marriage or rather by the law of fornication – with any other woman he pleases, either a relative of his own or his deserted wife or a woman whom

³⁶ She is portrayed much more negatively in the portion of the tale transcribed by H and mostly derived from Recension B, as we have seen. Nevertheless, we are told there, in what appears to be a gloss that has been incorporated into the text, that she was known for her purity (*glaine*) and her beauty (see above n.18). The notion of her purity conflicts with what we know of Recension B and so this gloss might be associated with Recension A or with another independent source.

somebody else has abandoned in an equally disgraceful way.’ (Clover and Gibson 1979, 71 ll.19-24)³⁷

The resemblance between Fand and the ‘woman whom somebody else has abandoned’ is quite arresting and Lanfranc’s sympathy with the discarded woman seems clear. As we have seen, Cú Chulainn describes her to Emer in terms of an ideal wife. It is noteworthy that her love for Cú Chulainn in Recension A is passionate but not lustful. At the point of her final departure from her beloved, she speaks of a desire and longing for him that is greater than the lure of the glories of the Otherworld:

*Messe ragas for astur / cé dech lim ar mórgestul:
cé tora nech, lín a blad, / ropad fherr lim tairisem.*

*Robad fherr lim bith hi fus, / dobér fót láim cen dobus,
ná dula, cid ingnad lat, / co gríanan Áeda Abrat.*

‘I shall go on a journey | though I like our adventure best (?) | Though some famous man should come to me | I would liefer stay.

I would liefer be here – I shall confess it to thee without grudge – than to go – though thou mayest wonder – to the sun-palace of Áed Abrat.’ (SCC §44 ll.732-9)

Tragically for her, her desire cannot be fulfilled nor can it be forgotten. She is condemned to love Cú Chulainn even though he has rejected her: *aní ná roich lám cid acht, is écen dam a dúthracht*, ‘I must long for what my hand cannot yet reach.’ (SCC §44 ll. 742-3). And love given may not be returned:

*Mairg dobeir seirc do duni, / menes tarda dia airi:
is ferr do neoch a chor ass, mane charthar mar charas.*

‘Unhappy is one who gives love to another | unless it be cherished: | it is better to be thrust aside | unless love is given for love.’ (SCC §44 ll. 748-51).

The terms employed here for her love are positive. *Dúthracht* ‘desire, longing’ has none of the negative connotations associated with other terms for desire³⁸ and, indeed, comes to denote religious devotion and zeal. *Caraid* has positive connotations and *serc* is used to denote love for God as well as erotic love. Remarkably, therefore, the ostensibly illicit love of Fand for Cú Chulainn is depicted as pure and laudable.

Fand’s situation and her analysis of it appeals to its audience not to confuse love/passion with marriage and this is perhaps a key idea within the text. Not all love leads to marriage and love can lead you astray: *Is éraise in rét int sherc: / téit a héol cen immitecht*, ‘Love is vain | it

³⁷ Later glosses in the tract on marriage lay heavier penalties on a man who divorces his wife than obtained at the earlier period and Jaski (1996, 31) suggests that this was intended to discourage men from carrying out irresponsible acts purely to obtain a divorce.

³⁸ For some of the linguistic connotations of lust see Clancy 1993, 106-107 et passim.

vanishes quickly' (§45 ll.773-4). The adjective *éraise* is defined in *DIL* as 'useless, insignificant; void' and the corresponding denominative verb as 'makes void, invalidates, confutes, rejects'. Human love (*serc*) is transient and trivial. It lasts only for a brief time and then is snatched away. Fand invites us to consider the fleetingness of erotic love, thereby tacitly pointing to a higher form of love, namely, love of God. But women cannot help themselves because 'women are foolish' (*at báetha cíalla ban*, §45 l.804). Love drives women to make fools of themselves and they must pay the consequences: her abandonment by Cú Chulainn was shameful to her (§44).

This may be why Fand receives such a positive depiction in the later version. The author is not concerned with demonising her but deliberately equates her love for Cú Chulainn and Emer's love for him. Fand's love is just as genuine and sincere as Emer's and cannot be dismissed as lust. Fand has been and promises again to be a good wife, just as Emer is. Thus, we have two ideal partners for Cú Chulainn, so what is there to choose between them? The answer is supplied by Emer's appeal to the foundation of their relationship, the dignity of the longstanding bond between them. This is an appeal to longevity over the moment, duty over passion. As Fand proclaims, human love, even of a husband or wife, is vain as it does not last. In the end, loyalty trumps desire.

Fand turns from her rejection by Cú Chulainn to an attempt to restore her own marriage to Manannán, and she does this in a markedly strident and defiant manner fitting of a strong wife. In a blast of searing honesty in Manannán's presence, she candidly declares her love for Cú Chulainn: *fil úaib nech bad fherr lim a chéli do lenmain. Acht... is letsu ragatsa, *7 ní irnaidiub Coin Culaind, ar rom thréc*, 'there is one of you, whom I would liefer follow than the other. But... I will go with you, and I will not wait upon Cú Chulainn for he has abandoned me.' (§46 ll.822-4) She does not and cannot deny her passion for Cú Chulainn, and she claims no love for Manannán, but just as Emer has argued with Cú Chulainn on the basis of their original love and commitment to each other, so does Fand here. In an echo of Emer's words to Cú Chulainn, she tells Manannán, *ní fil rígain chátamail acotsu, atá immurgu la Coin Culaind*, 'thou hast not a worthy queen already, but Cú Chulainn has' (§46 ll.824-5), reminding him that she was a fitting (*comadas*) wife for him when they first married (§45 l.780). She further asserts her suitability as a wife when she declares that she and Manannán were equally matched at *fidchell*,³⁹ that is, that they were intellectual equals (§45 l.782). Her social standing on entering the marriage was also secure and it is clear that she could muster considerable wealth to bring into what must have been a union of joint property (*lánamnas comthinchuir*).⁴⁰ Fand, therefore, reaffirms the notion that marriage is not a match based on love or passion but on the sobre calculation of the wife's suitability, most notably her intellectual qualities, status and wealth. She agrees to return to Manannán on this basis, despite the fact that she still loves another man.

³⁹ The meaning of the phrase *cluchi eráil ar fhidchill* is a little obscure but Dillon understands it as indicating that the two players were equally matched.

⁴⁰ She asserts that of their household of one hundred men and one hundred women she contributed half (*Baí acum dar fráech immach | cóeca ingen illdathach: || doratus dó cóecait fer | centar in chóecat ingen*, 'I had over the heath | fifty maidens arrayed in many colours: | I gave him fifty men | beside the fifty maidens', §45 ll.787-90).

All the concerned parties, therefore, seem to have resigned themselves to an acceptance of the status quo. Cú Chulainn returns to Emer and Manannán returns to Fand. But the destructive influence of love remains. Cú Chulainn goes mad on seeing Fand depart and takes off into the mountains, living without food or water and sleeping outside every night. Emer once again takes control of the situation and has him found and brought back home. But he is inconsolable and tries to kill the poets who were sent to fetch him home so that the druids are forced to use magic to restrain him. They then give him a drink of forgetfulness (*dig ndermait*, l. 839) after which he forgets about Fand. Emer, too, is still distressed by the events of the *serglige* and potions are given to her to help her forget her jealousy (*deoga dermait a héta*, l. 841). Just as Emer had invoked Cú Chulainn's memory of their earlier marriage to encourage him to return, so now it is important for them both to forget the appearance of Fand. Nothing is told of Fand and it might be assumed that she continued to live in the pain of her unfulfilled love for Cú Chulainn but Manannán shakes his cloak between the two of them to ensure that they will never meet again.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUDIENCE

As far as I know, it has never been suggested that Recension A was redacted or written by a woman and it is in the nature of these texts that such matters are difficult, if not impossible, to determine.⁴¹ However, it is possible to argue on internal evidence that the intended audience was female. It has been noted before that women would have been among the audiences at storytelling occasions and this may be reflected to some extent in the extant tales. Findon (2013, 70), for example, has argued that female audiences might have identified with the flawed character of Becfhola in *Tochmarc Becfhola*. The positive portrayal of women in Recension A might be seen as another manifestation of this approach, the purpose of which was to show the female characters in a manner with which women would wish to identify and so to engage them with the story in a way that would not be possible with a male-dominated or misogynistic approach. Indeed, it might even be argued that not only did the author consider that women would have been among his audience but that women *were* his intended audience.

The pivotal roles of Líf Ban and Emer in their husbands' affairs is particularly important in this regard. Emer's assertion that men desire what is new and disregard the familiar surely would have resounded most intensely with women. But the positive portrayal of Fand in particular seems designed to encourage female listeners or readers to identify with that character. She has been abandoned by her husband and this immediately invites the audience to identify with the jilted woman. She is 'pure and chaste and bright and clever' (§42) as many women would wish to be seen (or at least as many male authors in the medieval period imagined that women would wish to be seen). I would argue that the author wants us to identify with Fand because he wants us to temporarily imagine what it is like to be the other woman in a love triangle. The author could have depicted Fand as a jezebel, a marriage breaker, but this would have alienated the female audience. By including the female perspective in the tale, he embraces that section of the audience and forces them to consider

⁴¹ See, for example, Clancy 1996 on female authorship of medieval Gaelic poems.

divorce both from the perspective of Emer and that of Fand. After all, any woman could find herself in Fand's position, in love with a married man and willing to break up his marriage in order to cement her own position and satisfy her own needs. This tale asks her to reconsider her possible course of action, to consider the fleetingness of love and to concentrate on the institution of marriage rather than on their own desires.

At the very least, the sympathetic portrayal of Fand in Recension A encourages the reader, whether male or female, to judge the actions, not the participants. It shifts emphasis away from a consideration of stock characters towards an evaluation of the validity and propriety of their decisions. The author does not promise easy solutions – all the protagonists end up living in misery and despair – but he clearly points towards the right and proper course of action – faithfulness and the stark reality that 'everything absent is perfect, everything known is neglected, until all knowledge is known'.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted here to separate out the discussion of the two recensions in order not to colour the interpretation of one by my understanding of the concerns of the other. However, in addition to various narrative ruptures, there are clear continuities between the two recensions, not only in the characters and the direction of the story, but also in their treatment of sexual themes. We have seen important differences, for example in the representation of the nature of Cú Chulainn's illness which suggests different understandings of the nature and source of love, but we may also now glimpse new connections between the two parts of the story. We have seen, for example, that Recension A is centrally concerned with safeguarding the position of the wife within marriage, and this should be compared with the threat to Eithne's status and her humiliation in Recension B when Cú Chulainn presents all the other women of Ulster with gifts but overlooks her. She declares herself completely devoted to Cú Chulainn (in contradistinction to the other women who are torn between him and their own husbands) and, although a substantial portion of that version is now lost, it appears that marriage, devotion and fidelity may have been key themes in this telling. She is a good wife, just like Emer, and it is noteworthy that she offers good advice, which is unfortunately rejected, to Cú Chulainn with regard to the hunting of the birds. However, she becomes markedly passive later in the tale and is barely seen again before this version breaks off. Her last appearance in Recension B is at Cú Chulainn's sickbed where she is placed submissively at his feet (§10). This stands in stark contrast to Emer's provocative behaviour in Recension A in which she chides the Ulster heroes for their passivity and stirs Cú Chulainn from his sickbed. Further research is required to determine the authorial concerns of Recension B and to investigate further possible connections with the later retelling.

Recension A presents an extraordinarily personal and detailed description of the negotiation between Cú Chulainn, Emer and Fand. Ideas of divorce, concubinage, fidelity and transitoriness are presented through their discussions. Cú Chulainn inhabits a world in which the taking of concubines is acceptable and normalised, and struggles to understand Emer's objections to his proposed relationship with Fand. He highlights Fand's desirability, echoing Emer's own outstanding qualities, and questions why he should not spend a while (*denus*) in

Fand's company. Emer points to her public shaming as a result of his actions and reminds her husband and her audience of the ephemerality of the new and the distant which seems more attractive than what is old and present. Her arguments turn, therefore, on the idea that what is novel is tantalising and exciting but will eventually pass, no matter how enticing and promising. When she recalls that they had lived together in dignity (*co cátaid*) once, Cú Chulainn relents and vows to stay with her forever. So fidelity triumphs over passion, but passion wreaks a heavy price for all three protagonists live on in misery. Only magic helps them forget, although one wonders if they ever lose the sorrow that results from Cú Chulainn's dangerous liason. The tale is a lesson in self-denial and temperance, showing the pain that results from the unleashing of passion, but it does not promise happiness as a result. Fidelity and restraint may be right but the pain of wanting remains.

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